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THE DUET.

"There is a family moving into a big house on the hill." Willie Holmes fully appreciated the importance of his announcement, and expected the flood of questions which followed it. A family moving into the big house on the hill! Why, the big house had been empty since Willie was a wee, toddling baby, and he was now fourteen years old. He, in company with the other village boys, had spent hours of unmitigated enjoyment playing tag in the large deserted garden, or creeping in to the long-closed windows, roaming at will in the wide halls and empty rooms. It was the house *par excellence*, of Linwood, towering in its lofty position over the little clusters of cottages in the vale formed by the hill's rising, and occupying, with its wide weep of garden, orchard, and pleasure grounds, almost the whole eminence. There were men in the village who had seriously thought of taking possession of the pretentious brick mansion; but from year to year it had been postponed, the builder and proprietor having left it with an agent, who did not urge its claims.

"Who are they, Willie?" The question was put by his eldest sister Nettie, who opened her large blue eyes with great interest at his announcement.

The Holmes family were at tea when master Willie came in with the latest news, and he dashed off to make himself presentable before he gave Nettie an answer. They were Robert Holmes's only children, yet beside Nettie sat one evidently much at home in the family. A tall, well-knit figure, curling brown hair, large hazel eyes and handsome features, made Mr. Rivers no unsightly addition to the farmer's well-spread board, and Nettie had evidently found this out. She was a simple, modest country girl, this heroine of mine, and when the young doctor came with his introductory letters to reside at the farmer's, Nettie's voice was one to urge his claims.

He was a man of sparkling intellect (yet not frothy, for his brilliancies were pure, dug from the mines of knowledge) and courteous, winning manners. Soon popular in his profession, he had learned early in his stay at Linwood to find the home parlor the most attractive of them all. To Nettie his presence was a source of never ending delight. Stories of travel, incidents gleaned from the ever-varying scenes of an active life, bright scraps of book-knowledge, criticisms on novels and poetry—these were the interests that made Nettie's eye glow, her cheeks flush, and hastened the day's toil, that the evening might be all free for listening. She was so pretty, so intelligent in spite of her modest estimate of herself, so eager to listen, yet so winningly shy, that Mr. Rivers was only too ready to join her when she stole softly into the parlor after tea. He was not her lover by protestation, yet in these long winter evenings, the summer rambles, drives or rides, two hearts were fast knitting together, in this pleasant cottage of Linwood.

Two years had Mr. Rivers lived with farmer Holmes at the time my story commences, and Nettie had grown from a shy, blushing school girl into a beautiful maiden, modest yet, but self-possessed, and in the social gatherings of the village a belle amongst her companions. No party was complete without Nettie Holmes, and of course the young doctor was her escort to all. Many sly, laughing speeches were made about Nettie's beau, but she heeded none of them. No

words of love-making had ever passed between herself and Mr. Rivers, yet she felt confident in the certainty of his love, sure that at some good time he would tell her of it. It was part of her very being, this love and trust; and so, happy and constant, she waited for him to confirm his actions by speech. He was her constant companion, her teacher, her protector, her escort, and in her pure little heart she firmly believed her lover.

And after this long preamble, during which Willie has washed and taken his place at the tea-table, we come back to the eventful fact—the big house on the hill was taken.

"Such furniture!" said Willie with much energy. "Such chairs and tables! And they've got a big box, too, that is a piano, somebody says."

"Oh," said Nettie, with wide open eyes, "I do so long to hear a piano! Who are they, Willie?"

"Why there's a lady and three daughters," replied Willie. "One of them is married, and has two little girls; then there's a grown up son, the married one is named Sawyer; her husband is in the navy, and he's away. The mother is a widow; her name is Loftus."

"A widow!" cried Mr. Rivers.

Nettie looked at him in utter amazement. His face was white as death, his bloodless lips parted, his eyes fixed on Willie with a strange stare. Seeing that he had attracted the attention of all the family, he gave a slight nervous laugh and left the table.

Nettie's interest in the big house and its inmates was lost in her wonderment about Mr. Rivers. He was always so self-possessed and quiet that this sudden agitation was as new as it was alarming. It was quite late in the evening before he joined them in the parlor; but when he came he was as self-possessed and quiet as if no word had ever stirred the depths of his heart to such marked manifestation. His manner to Nettie, always affectionate, had a new tenderness, his voice a new tone that thrilled her with happiness; yet there was a sadness lurking in the depths of his dark eyes, a shadow on his brow that had never been so deep. He was never gay, but his usual manner was cheerful; now it was quiet and sad, as if a new, strange grief had befallen him.

It was not long before the new-comers were the belles of the village. With wealth and style, the young ladies were gracious in manner, courteous to everybody, and prompt to make friends. Walter, the son, was handsome enough to win his way easily in the hearts of the villagers, and the big house was one of the most popular in Linwood. They had been in their new home but a short time when Nettie called with her mother to welcome them and extend the hospitality of the farm to the new-comers. The little village beauty returned delighted with her visit; Mrs. Loftus and Mrs. Sawyer were so kind, the girls, Winnie and Emily, so handsome, and the son so courteous, Nettie could talk of nothing else, and the doctor listened eagerly. He asked her a thousand questions, calling the girls by their Christian names, and flushing out of his customary dignity to pour forth his eager interrogations.

"You will go with us on Thursday evening, will you not?" said Nettie. "We are invited to tea, and the invitation includes you. There will be no company; but Emily has promised that I shall hear the piano."

"I go! No—I—well, yes, I will go," said the

doctor, and again his pale face made Nettie wonder.

Thursday evening, the eventful evening, came, and what would be deemed in towns an unfashionably early hour the guests arrived at the big house. Mrs. Holmes, Nettie and Willie came first; the others were to join them after ten. The time passed pleasantly, though Nettie, in her constant little heart, wished Walter would not be quite so attentive, and was glad that Mr. Rivers was not there to see it. It was still early when farmer Holmes and the doctor arrived. Mrs. Holmes and Mrs. Loftus were in the boudoir, deep in the mysteries of a new embroidery pattern, and upon Nettie fell the task of introducing the doctor and her father. The latter was cordial and pleasant in his greeting, but the doctor's face was pallid, and the hand that held Nettie's cold as death. He made a stiff bow, and stood leaning against the mantel-piece, evidently ill at ease. Nettie, accustomed to see him the life of society, courteous and popular, puzzled her brain in vain to account for this strange manner. It threw a chill over them all. At last, to break the spell, the sisters threw open the grand piano and began to play—first Emily, then Winnie, and finally both sat down for a duet.

Where was the pleasure Nettie expected to derive from hearing that wonderful instrument? Gone! lost in her strange bewilderment over the doctor's conduct. From the moment when the piano was opened his face had changed from its cold reserve to a look of most eager interest. He had come nearer and nearer to the piano, till, leaning forward, his whole soul was in the eager eyes watching the players.

Walter Loftus had drawn Nettie down to a seat, and was leaning over near her, talking with love-like earnestness, and his mother gliding softly in, took the seat to her right; yet, while her answers were polite to the host, her ear could catch the doctor's quick breathing, and if she turned her head, it was to see his eyes fixed upon the players. At last the long duet was over, and the groups round the piano moved their position. Nettie stood up—Walter stood beside her.

Her heart was sick with a new sensation. Never in his warmest moods had the doctor's eyes rested upon her as they now rested upon Emily Loftus; and when Mrs. Sawyer took her turn at the piano, Nettie saw Mr. Rivers bend over the young lady with an earnest face and tender manner, that cut her to the heart. All the evening he was beside her, and the walk home was taken in silence. This was but the beginning of her sorrow. Day after day Mr. Rivers was the guest of the big house; and while Nettie, keeping her heart still for him, spite of its pain, was cold and distant to Walter, his attentions to the fair Emily redoubled. They walked and rode together. The long evenings, before spent in the farmhouse so pleasantly, were now lonely and sad for Nettie, while the doctor was away at the big house.

Poor little Nettie! Her sweet face grew pale over her sick, sad heart; and if for an hour Mr. Rivers still gentle attentions called back the smile to her lip, it faded when he left her. What were her modest charms to this dashing, accomplished girl's? Nothing! Though he broke her heart, she found excuses for him in the beauty of her rival.

It was late in the Autumn, and the Loftus family had been about two months in Linwood, when one evening Nettie passed through the grounds on her way to the little village. Farmer Holmes

lived, as did many others, on the south side of the hill, while the shops of the village were principally on the north side. The path through the garden of the big house was a thoroughfare for those passing over the hill, and Nettie took it. She did not raise her eyes from a long fit of musing till she stood in front of the house; then the light from the drawing-room windows, striking across her path, made her look up. One look, and she stood as if nailed to the spot.

It was a cruel scene for her loving heart that was passing in that gaily furnished room. Mr. Rivers was standing by the fire-place, and Emily Loftus was before him. Some tale of interest his eager lips were telling, for she listened with flushed cheeks and quivering lip till he opened his arms to enfold her in a long close embrace. Then the door opened, and the rest came in. Emily sprang to her mother's side, telling some new-found happiness, and then, as the group closed round Mr. Rivers, Nettie, with a cry of pain, ran forward with a fearful speed homeward. Home! home, to shut herself close in her little room, and pour forth her bitter woe in choking sobs. She had so loved, so trusted him, that it seemed as if she could not bear this proof of faithlessness and live. The long night passed without one hour of sleep.

How wildly and blindly she had loved him! many nights before, she had lain awake to think of him; but then it was to recall his soft, sweet voice, as it murmured low cadences of poetry, or in clear clarion tones taught her to sing some favorite ballad, praising her bird-like voice. It was to think of his goodness, his kind care in his profession, and wonder how he could love so ignorant and simple a country girl as herself.

Now she felt bitterly that, while she had been loving with all the fervor of her warm, impulsive heart, he had been trifling, testing perhaps his powers of pleasing. The moraine found her pale and weary, but with the innate pride of womanhood she rose, resolved that he should not triumph over her whom he had slighted and injured.

She was in the dining-room when he entered, and she fairly started when she saw his face. All the gravity, the half sadness which had always marked it, was gone, and in its place shown a joy that was radiant. Never had his face lighted with such a smile as he then gave her; crossing the room to take her hand in a warm, cordial pressure.

"Can you give me an hour after breakfast?" he asked; "I have something to tell you, Nettie."

Never had his voice dwelt with such lingering fondness upon her name. Was he about to make her the confidante of his love? She believed this; yet she could smile and say, "Certainly!"

His impatience to tell was as great as was her dread of listening, for he hurried through the meal, and then, not speaking of her untouched cup and plate, he took her little cold hand and led her into the parlor.

"Nettie," he said, as soon as he had seated himself beside her, "I am going to tell you who I am!"

Nettie opened her large blue eyes.

"Yes," said he, laughing, "I understand your look. I am Dr. Rivers, medical practitioner of this lovely village of Linwood; but this is not all. My father died when I was but ten years old, leaving my mother a widow with five children—two sisters older than myself, one sister and a brother younger. Between this young sister and myself

there was the strongest tie of love, and we were from babyhood almost inseparable. When my father had been some two years dead, my mother married again, and then my misery commenced. I cannot tell you all the persecutions my stepfather lavished upon me, simply because I was the only one who opposed my mother's marriage. To her he was a kind husband, he was proud of my beautiful sisters, and my brother was too young to cross him; but his hatred of myself was one of the ruling passions of his life. I was a high-spirited, passionate boy, and my patience was soon exhausted. Daily my father's anger was visited upon me for some petty fault, till, driven desperate by persecution, I ran away from home.

"For two years my life was passed in the metropolis, working hard for my bread; but ultimately my health gave way, and I became the inmate of one of the public offices. I was very ill, but from that illness dates the change in my life.

"Dr. Rivers was one of the warmest-hearted, most eccentric old bachelors that ever lived. Something in his forlorn little patient interested him, and he soon won my confidence. But I will not weary you with the history of our friendship. Suffice it to say that I rose from that sick bed to become the adopted son of the doctor. He was wealthy, and had me educated in his own profession. Before he took me home he exacted from me a promise that I would never return to my stepfather, and I willingly gave it. Upon his death I became, by his will, heir to his property, and, having a strong love for my profession, sought out a quiet home, where I could at once enjoy my practice and the delight of country life.

"And now, Nettie, comes the happy part of my story. I have found my mother, sisters and brother free from the tyrant who made my boyhood so wretched. I was afraid they would never forgive the prodigal who so suddenly and selfishly left them and for weeks I dared not speak. Last night, however, my sister spoke so tenderly, so regretfully of the brother whom she had lost, that I could keep silence no longer. I shall never take the name they have all adopted; but my mother is Mrs. Loftus, and my sisters are your friends."

Happy little Nettie! Spite of herself, the joy she felt would spring up to her expressive face, the dimpling smile to her lip, the color to her cheek. And when, in a more tender, earnest tone, the doctor preferred a suit near to his heart, there did not live in Linwood a prouder, happier little maiden than Nettie. With the frank simplicity of a child, she told him all her doubts and misery of the past few weeks, receiving reiterated assurances of his faithful love.

It was a happy evening—the one that followed this confidence. In the drawing room of the big house the newly-found brother brought the blushing little Nettie to his mother, sisters and brother as a claimant for love, and most cordially was she welcomed.

They were all standing round the piano when Emily struck the first chords of a duet from "Martha."

"Ah, Emily!" said her brother, "when you played that once before, little did you imagine that I was longing to rush at you like a maniac, and clasp you in my arms."

"You certainly showed it in your eyes," said Nettie, in a low tone, that reached his ear only. "From that duet dates all my dream of misery."

"And my hope of happiness," he replied, softly, "dates from those powerful chords."

FEARFUL PERIL.

Mr. Carl Steinman visited Mount Hecla, in Iceland, just before its terrible eruption in 1845, and the following is his narrative of a fearful adventure which happened to him upon that sublime and desolate elevation:

"Having procured a guide I set off, at an early hour, on the morning following my arrival at Salsum (at the foot of the extinct volcano) praying for fair weather, good luck, and a safe return.

"The scenery, even from the first, was so different from any I had ever seen outside of Iceland as to be worthy of a better description than I am able to give. Suffice it to say that, as you push on, ascending summit after summit on your way to the great and awful centre of all, you find the danger, dreariness, and desolation increase to the most terrible sublimity, till at last, when you do finally stand on the highest point in this unliving world of chaos, you instinctively pray God, with an icy shudder shivering through your miserable frame, to restore you to the life you seem to have left for ever behind you.

"Oh, how shall I attempt to convey to any mind the awful scene of desolation that surrounded me when at last I stood more than four thousand feet above the level of the sea, on the highest peak of the barren Hecla! Six mortal hours—three on horseback and three on foot—had I been clambering upward from the world below; and now, among the very clouds that rolled and swept around me, I stood in a world of lava mountains, ice and snow—the lava black as midnight, the snow of blinding whiteness—and not in all that region a tree, a brush, a shrub, a blade, or even a solitary living thing, excepting self and guide. Far as the eye could reach, when the moving clouds permitted me to see, was a succession of black, rugged hills, snow-crowned peaks, glistening glaciers, and ice-bound streams, into whose inanimate solitudes no human foot had ever penetrated—a world without plant or life—the very desolation of desolation—filled with yawning chasms, dreadful abysses and midnight caves, which had never echoed any sounds but the thunders of heaven, and the groanings and convulsions of earth. So wild and terrible was the scene, that I felt a strange thrill, like madness, rush through my shivering frame, and quiver about my dizzy brain, and I shouted to break the stillness of death, and heard my voice come dismally back in a hundred echoes, till it seemed to be lost at last in the bowels of the unproductive earth.

"Wrapping one of the blankets about me, to protect me from the freezing cold, and cautiously using my pointed stick to try every foot of ground before me, I now began to move about over blocks and heaps, and hills of lava, and across narrow chasms, and pitfalls, and patches of snow and ice, my faithful guide keeping near, and often warning me to be careful of my steps. In this manner I, at length, ascended a ridge of considerable elevation, stumbling my way to the top, and now and then, displacing fragments